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ABSTRACT

Characteristics of 32 children who claimed to be bullied were examined and compared to a control group. Teachers and a psychologist rated the Ss on three aspects: physical characteristics (size and weight for age, attractiveness, physical robustness, appropriateness of dress, odd mannerisms or physical handicaps); personal and psychological characteristics (such as extroversion vs. introversion, adjustment or frustration tolerance or aggressiveness vs. compliance); and social and family background features (such as balanced or extreme child-rearing problems). Bullied children appeared to have more negative traits than a control group of more popular and non-bullied children. Physical attractiveness, physical capability, and willingness to retaliate significantly differentiated Ss from non-bullied children. Non-bullied Ss showed greater sensitivity to the feelings of others and helped protect others, tended to be less selfish, and better adjusted in their capacity to control their feelings. Non-bullied Ss were also more likely to be taught to consider others and not merely themselves. (CL)

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THE BULLIED AND NON-BULLIED CHILD
(A Contrast Between the Popular and Unpopular Child)

-by-

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THE BULLIED AND NON-BULLIED CHILD

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I

Having already written an article based on research into the psychology of the bully, (Lowenstein 1977) it seemed only appropriate that another study be committed to writing about the victim of bullies.

No direct actual relevant research was discovered in recent years, based either on bullies or their victims, so it was necessary to rely almost totally on the present investigation. Certain areas in the existing research will undoubtedly have had peripheral relevance; chiefly among these are: social inadequacy, victimisation, violence, etc.

Certainly bullies appear to be especially adept at identifying their hapless victims, (Lowenstein 1976) because they are on the whole, fearful and likely to accept the bullying and will not retaliate, or will not retaliate effectively. Bullied individuals are unlikely to obtain much sympathy from their peer group and this further alienates them and gives the bully encouragement to continue. Bullied individuals tend, on the whole, to be cold, rather than friendly. They are also demanding rather than giving, (Lowenstein 1977). This further separates them from being accepted by the peer group.

The bully is aware that his victim may turn to adults for support, but this makes him all the more adept in bullying behind the scenes and becoming extremely skilful in avoiding discovery.

Even when discovered, the bully has the support of the peer group, while the victim loses the little support he has had, and is likely to be bullied even more. Behind any bullied individual therefore, are a number of negative conditions or aspects and these are associated with being a victim of bullying and general unpopularity. These limitations in these

areas reduce the individuals capability to practice effective social skills, i.e. they are unable to co-operate effectively in a group, Tuckman 1965. Such individuals also fail to find a complementary position in the dominant hierarchy (Schutz, 1958). Instead they are fixated on behaviour which reduces their positive "valence" for inducing good relationships and instead is likely to alienate others. This is the first step either to being isolated and receiving no attention from the group and asking none, or being bullied and receiving attention by becoming a victim.

Numerous other experiments have shown that a deviate, of which the bullied child is an example, becomes an object of considerable attention - usually negative attention. The changes sought to be made in the bullied ch children seem to be ones of conformity to the peer group. Individuals who resist this are likely to be isolated to be victimised, or both. A study of popular or accepted children in social groups could be a useful exercise, since many of the positive traits found in popular children might be inculcated in the bullied (unpopular) child. Popular children were studied by Jennings (1950). These children tended not to be the ones who were bullied. Certain characteristics which were apparent were:

1. They helped and protected tothers.
2. They tended to cheer others up.
3. They made others feel accepted and wanted.
4. They controlled their own negative moods so as not to upset others by their own depression or anxieties.
5. They were capable of establishing rapport with others.
6. They won the confidence of others.
7. They were concerned with the feelings and needs of others.
8. They were similar in interest, background and social values.

Added to this list is the evidence from Winch (1958) which indicates that compatibility meant opposites were preferred on traits like dominance, submissiveness, nurturance and succorance. Similarly personality sameness is preferred on such traits as neuroticism, extroversion/introversion and accepting a complementary role is useful to most children. Hence more intelligent children will prefer to associate with more intelligent children and children from the same social background will also prefer one another. This is essentially based on the fact that most people like others to be like themselves. Individuals tend to reciprocate being liked just as they reciprocate being disliked or rejected. One also tends to prefer those who can help one attain one's needs. This was found by Jennings (1950) in her already mentioned characteristics of popular children.

II The Problem.

The Problem of the research was to seek some general areas that could be hypothesized as differentiating bullied from non-bullied children. They may be categorised roughly, as the following:

1. Certain physical characteristics.

2. Certain personal characteristics or traits.

3. Certain social and family background features.

III The Method.

32 children who claimed that they were bullied came to the attention of the Psychologist. Referral came from two sources (parent and teacher) and before a child was accepted as a victim of bullying, the following criteria needed to exist:

1. The child himself complained of bullying.

2. The teacher had evidence or had made observations to the effect that the child was being bullied.

3. Other children verified that the child in question was being bullied.

4. In some, but not all of cases, the parents of the children being bullied were aware of this.

Those children who were bullied were randomly matched with another child in the classroom by taking a child of the same sex who sat physically closest to the bullied child, but was neither a bully nor one of the victims of bullying. These children formed the control group.

The 32 bullied children and their control group were then observed intensively and investigated on the following characteristics.

1. Physical characteristics, i.e., size and weight for age, attractiveness, physical robustness, appropriateness of dress, odd mannerisms or physical handicaps.

2. Personal and psychological characteristics; extroversion vs. introversion, sensitivity to the feelings of others, orientation of liking or disliking other individuals, adjustment or frustration trolerance, flexibility of interest, conforming or "fitting in" with other children, moderate vs. excessive need to dominate, aggressiveness vs. compliance, boastfullness vs. modesty, self-seeking vs. unselfish demeanour, independance or being demanding of others in seeking personal gratification.

3. Social and family background features; considering others rather than merely one's self, having friendly or unfriendly

parents, balanced or extreme child-rearing problems (extreme permissiveness vs. extreme authoritarianism) coming from roughly the same, or disimilar home backgrounds from the other children.

Both teachers and the Psychologist rated the children and when disagreement occurred, a mean was taken of the ratings. The children were rated on a 1-5 scale: 1 was very low and 5 was very high on the 3 characteristics established in Tables I, II and III. The observations took place over a period of three days. In the case of absence, the observation continued until every child in the experimental group (bullied group) had been given appropriate ratings.

The children were themselves unaware of the reason for being questioned and since the control group was questioned and assessed in the same way as the experimental group, no apparent notice was taken of the procedure. The observers, (teacher and parent) were not made aware why the children were being observed and rated by them. The use of the matched control sample helped to disguise the fact that the children were being studied "because they were being bullied". The observers obviously sensed they were describing or assessing the personality and other features of children, but bias should have been minimal.

IV Results.

Bullied children appear to have more negative traits than a control group of more popular and non-bullied children as observed by teachers and the Psychologist. This was principally in the following areas set out in Tables I, II and III.

* Table I

Physical Characteristics

Physical Characteristics	Bullied Group (n = 32)		Non-Bullied Group (n (m 32)		Chi^2 Significance	
		means		means	Chi^2	Sig
1. Physical Robustness	62	1.94	98	2.31	28.88	.001
2. Physical attractiveness	74	2.31	111	3.47	7.4	.01
3. Appropriateness of dress	131	4.09	137	4.28	.1342	not sig
4. No odd mannerisms or physical handicaps	101	3.16	124	3.88	2.35	not sig
5. Physically capable to and willing to retaliate if necessary	78	2.49	123	3.84	10.074	0.01

* Used Fisher and Yates "Statistical Tables for biological, agricultural and medical Research". Published by Oliver and Boyd, Ltd.

* Table II

Personal Characteristics and Psychological Traits

Physical Characteristics	Bullied Group (n = 32)		Non-Bullied Group (n = 32)		Chi^2 Significance	
		Means		Means	Chi^2	Sig
1. Extroverted, outgoing and capable of quick rapoort with others	119	3.72	127	3.97	0.26	not sig
2. Sensitive to feelings of others and help to protect others	67	2.09	101	3.16	6.88	0.01
3. Tend to have an orientation of liking others, i.e. unselfish and kind.	86	2.69	116	3.63	4.455	o.001
4. Better adjustment and better capacity to control their fellings	59	1.84	114	3.56	34.272	0.001
5. Had widest and most flexible interests	74	2.31	105	3.28	5.36	0.05
6. Joined in with others in work more effectively and tended to conform to the norms	69	2.16	117	3.66	12.387	0.001
7. Were not excessively dominating	96	3.00	115	3.59	1.710	not sig
8. Were not excessively aggressive	79	2.47	121	3.78	8.82	0.01
9. Were not excessively boastful	59	1.84	119	3.72	20.787	0.001

* Table II (contin)

Personal Characteristics and Psychological Traits

Physical Characteristics	Bullied Group (n = 32)		Non-Bullied Group (n = 32)		Chi^2 Significance	
		Means		Means	Chi^2	Sig
10. Were not excessively attention seeking	69	2.16	107	3.34	8.204	0.01
11. Were not excessively self-seeking for reward	74	3.22	111	3.47	8.894	0.01
12. Were not excessively demanding of others to do things for them	81	2.53	121	3.78	26.446	0.001

* Used Fisher and Yates "Statistical Tables for Biological, Agricultural and Medical Research", published by Oliver and Boyd, Ltd.

Table III *

Social and Family Background Features.

Features	Bullied Group (n = 32)		Non-Bullied Group (n =32)		Significance	
		Means		Means	Chi^2	Sig
1. Taught to consider others and not merely themselves	57	1.78	117	3.66	20.689	0.001
2. Friendly parents	97	3.03	103	3.22	0.18	not sig
3. Balanced child-rearing (not excessively authoritative or permissive)	91	2.84	119	3.72	3.733	not sig
4. Come from roughly the same social background as the norms for the school	111	3.47	116	3.63	0.11	not sig

* Used Fisher and Yates "Statistical Tables for Biological, Agricultural and Medical Research", published by Oliver and Boyd Ltd.

V. Conclusions

1. Some physical characteristics such as physical robustness, physical attractiveness and physical capability and willingness to retaliate significantly differentiate non-bullied from bullied children in the expected direction. There is no significance between bullied and non-bullied children on appropriateness of dress or odd mannerisms or physical handicaps.

2. Non-bullied children were also significantly differentiated from bullied children in that non-bullied children showed greater sensitivity to the feelings of others and helped to protect others, tended to have an orientation of liking others and tending to be

less selfish and more kind and also tending to be better adjusted in their capacity to control their feelings. Non-bullied children also had a wider and more flexible selection of interests and joined in with others in work more effectively. They were also more likely to conform to the norms of the group. Non-bullied children were also not excessively aggressive. Bullied children tended to be more boastful, more attention seeking, more self-seeking for reward and more demanding of others to do things for them. No significance was reached when bullied children were compared with non-bullied children on need to dominate and extroversion vs. introversion but direction however here was that non-bullied children tended to be slightly more extroverted and able to establish and quick rapport with others and also that non-bullied children were less dominating than bullied children.

3. In comparing aspects of social and family background it was found that non-bullied children were more likely to be taught to consider others and not merely themselves. The other areas ofsocial and family background did not reach statistical significance but the direction in which the traits fell may be of some interest. Non-bullied children tended to have somewhat more friendly parents and a balanced child rearing approach (not excessively authoritative or permissive). Non-bullied children also came roughly from the same social background as the norm of the school.

VI Discussion

A number of distinct characteristics (physical) and personality traits appear to be associated with children who are likely to be bullied.

Social and family background features seem to influence the possibility

of being bullied, but according to the present research, statistical significance of such factors were not reached.

Social skills and the capacity to communicate, be popular and show interest in others, are likely to militate against being bullied.

Children who are physically robust, extroverted, socially sensitive, unselfish, flexible, conforming to group norms, rewarding, unaggressive, non-attention seeking and modest individuals, are less likely to be bullied than those who have the opposite traits.

Certain remedial aspects may be proposed as a result of the present research. These might be inculcated by a combination of parental rearing, educational and mass media approaches. These remedial features might be to: (a) increase motivation to seek effective social relationships with the bullied child; (b) develop opportunities for good social contacts in order to provide practice in social contacts; (c) suggest the use of specific social skills to be accepted and learned - this includes developing a wider interest in what others are doing, seeking to reward, praise or consider others rather than seek/for oneself, i.e. this merely not seeking praise for oneself exclusively; taking a sincere interest in other people; avoiding being hostile towards others; looking at people when interacting with them; training in accuracy of perception, i.e. seeing situations from not merely one's own point of view.

The study of the bullied and non-bullied child reveals that bullying is, at least, partly associated with certain characteristics of the victim. These characteristics probably derive from genetic and partly from environmental conditions. There is little that can be done about genetically produced aspects and hence any study for diagnosing and eventually treating features associated with bullying, should concentrate on environmental influence.

This study would seem to provide a first step in seeking to apply such knowledge towards helping bullied children avoid victimisation by developing those areas of weakness that are compatible with social adjustment.

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